

The Red Army and the Great Terror. Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military. By Peter Whitewood. Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-7006-2117-0. Glossary. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 360. \$37.50 (cloth).

Between June 1937 and November 1938, the Red Army was subjected to a major purge, which spread from an attack on the officer corps to the rank and file. Its full extent is difficult to calculate, but an estimated 35,000 military leaders were removed from the ranks, thousands were arrested and many executed. The devastation and disruption this wrought on the Red Army has often been cited as factor in the Red Army's disastrous military performance in the months following the German invasion in June 1941. Understanding and explaining why Stalin unleashed a campaign so damaging to the Red Army's combat performance and the Soviet Union's security has long occupied historians. Yet, despite the effort to re-examine the history of the Great Terror in the 1980s and 1990s the military purge has not, until now, undergone a thorough re-interpretation. On the basis of new archival evidence, drawn from the Russian State Military Archive (RGVA) and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), including Stalin's personal papers, *The Red Army and the Great Terror* offers an important re-examination of this remarkable episode in political and military history.

Over the course of six carefully constructed chapters, Whitewood examines how anxieties about the political loyalty of the Red Army evolved and shifted over the twenty years from 1917 to 1937. Chapter 1 details how the Red Army was perceived by the Bolshevik party and security organs as a target for infiltration by the state's enemies. Concerns about the Red Army's internal security, as Chapter 2 demonstrates, continued long after the Civil War. Rumours and suspicion remained influential, even though these anxieties had little foundation in reality. Chapter 3 focuses on a period of crisis in the early 1930s, when a perceived foreign-backed conspiracy in the upper levels of the Red Army coincided with a period of growing discontent amongst the rank and file because of the collectivisation of agriculture. Although the Red Army experienced the early to mid-1930s as a period of relative calm, as Chapter 4

examines, the wider political atmosphere deteriorated as Stalin gained greater control. By 1936 many doubts remained about whether all potential enemies had been purged from the army, but there was little indication that a purge would spread beyond removing suspected Trotskyists. In Chapter 5, the focus shifts to mapping the intricate pattern of events that pushed Stalin and the political police to launch a military purge in 1937. A final chapter explores the connection between the fallout of the military purge, and the start of mass operations targeting suspect population groups.

Whitewood argues that Stalin attacked the Red Army because he perceived a serious security threat within it, rather than out a desire to enforce total control of the dysfunctional Soviet system. 'In this respect,' as he writes, 'Stalin launched the military purge from a position of vulnerability and misperception rather than from a position of confidence and strength.' (pp. 13–14). In pursuing this argument, he guides the reader through the historiographical controversies that have surrounded interpretations of the Great Terror. This study also advances an original explanation for the mass operations, the high point of the terror, which extended the purge beyond the political elite. Although the preconditions existed for mass repression to mushroom in the mid-1930s it was the military purge which acted as a trigger to launch a purge of wider society in the summer of 1937. Having discovered a military-fascist plot within the Red Army, the political police were encouraged to perceive foreign backed conspiracies in other Soviet institutions and the ordinary population. Having revealed how vulnerable one of the pillars of Soviet order appeared to be to foreign infiltration, population groups perceived as dangerous or unreliable began to be targeted.

The Red Army and the Great Terror deserves to be read widely. Scholars hoping to learn more about how the military purge affected the Red Army's command structures, combat performance, and morale on the eve of an impending war, may need to look elsewhere. Whitewood, however, succeeds in his aim of placing the purge into the wider context of

political repression in the 1930s. Indeed, he does this so successfully that in addition to advancing a new interpretation of the military purge, the book also serves as a valuable introduction to the dynamics of purge and terror beyond the armed forces. Whitewood writes clearly and accessibly, allowing the reader to follow the complexities of Stalin's misperceptions about the threats posed by suspect elements within the Red Army, the suspicions of the political police, and the forces that expanded the purge far beyond Marshal Tukhachevskii and the officers linked to the former political opposition. Anybody interested in Soviet civil-military relations between the Revolution and the Second World War will learn a great deal from reading this meticulously researched study.

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